h Dickson G-8 (1939-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Bahrain MJ4

Birth of a Baby

Chap. X

A man cohabits with his wife until close on the birth of their child. 843
As soon as the baby is born, however, the mother becomes "unclean" 846
(*nagis* or *najis*) and the husband cannot go near her for forty days.
This rule is carefully observed among all classes.

After a child is born, a very common method of treating the womb 846
is to pack it with common salt. This is a very painful operation, and
results in great suffering later, for a thickening of certain tissues
supervenes, with disastrous consequences. The Mission hospital
authorities in Kuwait and Bahrain are never tired of preaching the
evil of the practice, but with little result.

After the birth of a child Badawin women, and more especially
Arab townswomen, resort to various drugs, etc., to reduce the size
of the vagina to normal, or less than normal. This "pleases the hus-
band", they say. Alum is the basic principal of the drugs employed.
Zahwa, Shammari wife of 'Abdullah bin Mu'ad of the Abda,* told
me this in April 1931 on one of my wife's and my many visits.

Many women, having had two or three children, dread to have 842
more, and my wife has frequently been asked both in the town and
in the desert of Kuwait how they can prevent further conception.
It is universally believed among them that European women know
many methods of contraception, but are unwilling to divulge their
secrets. Among Badawin generally, if a woman has difficulty in bearing 845
her child, a mare is brought in to her apartment or the portion of tent
set apart for her; barley is then placed in her lap, and the mare is
induced to eat. If the animal whinnies and eats, all is well, two or
three rifle shots are fired at the same time, and the woman is thus
given strength to bring forth.

It sometimes happens that immediately after birth the mother 847
becomes what the Badawin call *mukhabbal* (mad), and unable to speak.†
This is considered a very dangerous state, and according to them will
result in death unless she can be induced to speak. In such situations
also, a mare is hastily sent for and brought to the woman's side and
offered barley from her lap. If the mare eats, the woman's tongue is
loosed and her reason returns. If not, according to the common belief,
the woman is sure to die.

On 20th February, 1933, in Kuwait, my own mare was borrowed

* Shammar tribe. † This epilepsia is probably a form of hysteria.